

**Higher Education Authority****Report of 424<sup>th</sup> Meeting held on 19<sup>th</sup> July 2022 in 3 Shelbourne Buildings, Dublin 4**

- Present:
- Mr Tony Donohoe (agenda items 1-10)
  - Dr Judith Eaton (agenda items 1-10)
  - Dr Sharon Feeney via MS Teams (agenda items 3-10)
  - Professor Orla Feely, Deputy Chair (agenda items 1-10)
  - Mr Michael Horgan, Chairperson (agenda items 1-10)
  - Ms Darina Kneafsey (agenda items 1-10)
  - Dr Sinéad O’Flanagan (agenda items 1-10)
  - Mr Pól Ó Móráin (agenda items 1-10)
  - Ms Beth O’Reilly via MS Teams (agenda items 1-10)
  - Dr Lynn Ramsey (agenda items 1-10)
- Apologies:
- Mr Ronan Lyons
  - Dr John Wall
  - Dr Alan Wall
- In attendance:
- Dr Bahram Bekhradnia (agenda items 1-10)
  - Dr Jim Mountjoy (agenda items 1-8)
  - Ms Orla Nugent (agenda items 1-9)
  - Dr Louise Callinan (agenda items 1-9)
  - Ms Pearl Cunningham (agenda items 1-9)
  - Mr Padraic Mellett (agenda items 1-9)
  - Dr Vivienne Patterson via MS Teams (agenda items 1-9)
  - Ms Eilis Noonan (agenda items 1-9)
  - Dr Ross Woods (items 3.2 and 4)
  - Dr Deirdre Quinn (items 3.1, 3.2 and 5)
  - Dr Victoria Brownlee (items 3.4 and 6)
  - Ms Teresa Gallagher (item 3.3 and 6)
  - Ms Niamh O’Donoghue (item 4)
  - Professor Anne Scott (item 4)
  - Dr Deirdre Lillis (item 5)
  - Mr Joe Moore (item 5)
  - Ms Catherine Halloran (item 7)

**Opening Remarks**

The Chair advised the Board that the cyber-security training scheduled for this meeting has been deferred to a meeting later in the year. He also advised members that Ms Noonan has prepared a template to record members interests and disclosed conflicts of interest. This will be maintained in the Board’s MS Teams facility.

The Chair noted that this would be Dr Bekhradnia and Dr Mountjoy's last meeting. He thanked them for their contribution to the work of the Board over the past 10 years. Speaking on behalf of the Executive Ms Nugent thanked Dr Bekhradnia and Dr Mountjoy for their contribution to the work of the Board and various standing committees they served on. Both Dr Bekhradnia and Dr Mountjoy thanked the Chair, Members and the Executive for their support over the past 10 years.

### **Conflicts of Interest**

The Chair reminded all Board members of potential conflicts of interest and asked members to highlight any items that may require attention. No conflicts of interest were disclosed.

### **Quorum**

The quorum for HEA Board meetings, six members, was met.

#### **1. Report of 423<sup>rd</sup> Board meeting**

The minutes were approved subject to a minor amendment to the members only item.

#### **2. Matters arising**

No matters arising were identified.

#### **3. Committee Reports**

##### **3.1 Report of the Finance & Governance Committee**

3.1.0 Dr O'Flanagan introduced the Committee's report.

###### *3.1.1 IRC funding – CHIST-ERA*

**Decision:** Subject to approval of funding from the other international consortium partners, the Board approved the funding commitment of €148,175 under Call 2021 of the CHIST-ERA programme.

###### *3.1.2 2023 Estimates*

The Committee considered the HEA Estimates in respect of Administration, Recurrent and Pensions funding. The following issues were raised;

- The importance of linking the request for additional staff resources with the additional responsibilities being imposed on the HEA by the new Act.
- The status of the RFAM reform. Ms Nugent advised that there have been no meetings over the past 18 months. The Executive are awaiting a decision from DPER and DFHERIS on how they wish to proceed.

**Decision:** Members approved the Estimates submission.

### *3.1.3 Extension of i-Graduate for student survey*

The Finance and Governance Committee recommended approval of the extension of the duration of the i-graduate contract for services to the StudentSurvey.ie (the Irish Survey of Student Engagement) project for a further term of 36 months, expiring on 31st October 2025.

**Decision:** Members approved the extension at a cost of € €266,038.39, plus the variable cost of free text redaction and translation for the 3 years (c €338,500).

### *3.1.3. Development of the Higher Education System Performance Framework 2023 – 2027*

The Committee was consulted on the development of the new performance framework. A key issue raised was the potential implications of separating reporting on strategy implementation and governance compliance. Other issues raised by the Committee included the suggestion that key performance indicators be replaced by key performance outcomes and the need to include student orientated themes having regard to the new legislation. Dr Callinan outlined the intention to present a draft framework to the Board in September.

### *3.1.4 Student Assistance Fund Underspends*

The underspend in SAF for 2020/2021 was noted by the Board.

The Board noted the Committee's report.

## **3.2 Report of the Policy & Strategic Planning Committee**

3.2.1 MS Kneafsey introduced the Committee's report.

### *3.2.1. Race Equality Implementation Plan*

Dr Woods presented the Race Equality Implementation plan to the Committee, following engagement with the Committee, the Athena Swan intersectional working group and other stakeholders, The PSP Committee recommended approval of the publication of the plan.

**Decision:** The Board approved the publication of the Race Equality Implementation Plan

### *3.2.2. College Awareness Week (CAW)*

The Committee recommended approval of additional funding for College Awareness Week of €10,670 for its 2022 campaign and proposed to advise CAW of the additional funding now to allow plans for the implementation of this year's campaign to progress.

**Decision:** The Board approved this funding

The Board noted the Committee's report.

### 3.3 Report of the Research & Graduate Education Committee

3.3.1. Professor Feely gave an update from this Committee. As this was Jenna Barry's last appearance as a member of the RGE Committee, the Committee paid tribute to her participation and thanked her for her contribution. Mr. Waqar Ahmed, USI VP for Postgraduate Affairs will join the RGE Committee to replace her.

#### 3.3.2. *National Forum on Research Integrity*

Professor Anita Maguire, Chair of the National Research Integrity Forum and Deputy Chairperson, Dr Jennifer Brennan, gave a presentation to the RGE Committee outlining the background, objectives, activities of the Forum and its recent restructuring.

#### 3.3.3 *Revised principles of good research practice*

The Committee agreed on the proposed changes regarding the inclusion of two additional principles, namely principle viii (Gender equality and inclusiveness) and principle ix (Research and sustainability).

#### 3.3.4 *Postgraduate Research Student Stipend survey*

The research carried out by Jenna Barry on behalf of USI indicates variations in the levels of stipend being offered across the sector. Having regard to increases in the cost of living, particularly the cost of accommodation, it was agreed that the level of stipend needs to be increased. It was noted the recently announced Innovate for Ireland initiative offers a €28,000 stipend.

**Decision:** Members agreed that the HEA together with the IRC and SFI should raise with DFHERIS the level of the stipend for research students.

The Board noted the Committee's report.

### 3.4 Report of the System Development & Performance Management Committee

3.4.1 Mr. O' Donoghue presented the Committee's report.

#### 3.4.2 *TU Transformation Fund*

The Committee received from the Executive an overview and analysis of the progress of projects supported by the TU Transformation Fund (TUTF). The TUTF is currently in its second year and has seen significant beneficial impacts since its introduction including the development and establishment of four new Technological Universities, the establishment of new executive structures, and substantial progress on systems integration.

To date, c€60m of TUTF has been disbursed directly to HEIs. The average level of actual expenditure at Year 2 interim report stage (28 February 2022) was 55%, resulting in a balance of TUTF grant funding of c€27m. This balance of TUTF grant funding reported by HEIs does not reflect committed expenditure.

The HEA Executive met TU presidents in June and asked them to provide further detail on committed expenditure related to the Year 2 budget and to indicate priorities for Year 3. The allocations for Year 3 will be determined following analysis of this additional information.

The following issues were raised;

- There is a reluctance on the part of the TUs to commit to expenditure on larger infrastructure projects without confirmation as to the level of funding support that will be received.
- Progress against some aspects of projects has been constrained by challenges in the recruitment of specialist IT expertise.
- It was confirmed that funding is only secured for one more year of the TUTF (2022-2023).

#### 3.4.3 System Performance Funding Allocations 2022

The Executive briefed the Committee on the performance funding process in 2022 and outlined the recommendations of the expert advisory panel regarding the allocations of €5 million in performance funding following a consensus meeting held on 13 June.

The recommendation of the panel is that the €5 million in performance funding should be divided equally amongst the HEIs with the six highest ranking case studies given the parity in quality, resulting in an award of €833,333 each.

**Decision:** The recommendations on the allocation of €5 million in performance funding to the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science were agreed by the Board as follows;

Institution	Award	Project
DKIT	€833,333	The changing landscape of Domestic Abuse – The impact of a multi-agency educational initiative
IADT	€833,333	Getting to Zero: How “Moving Parts” a Research & Creative collaboration moved the dial towards zero-tolerance of gender-based hostility and sexual violence.
NUIG	€833,333	Sustainable pathways to Higher Education: Delivering on educational opportunities for under-represented groups at NUI Galway
SETU	€833,333	Using the power of transformative education through inclusive education, leadership and enterprise to end the cycle of addiction
UCD	€833,333	Supporting Ireland's transition to a secure, net zero energy future
UL	€833,333	Implementing Generation Apprenticeship at Levels 9 and 10 on the NFQ.

#### *3.4.4 System Performance Framework 2023-27*

The following issues were raised;

- There will be consultation with HEIs on the framework via the Strategic Dialogue meetings in the autumn.
- Balance between strategy and governance compliance and the importance of finding some way of linking the two was noted and that institutions should meet governance compliance requirements in order to be eligible for performance funding.
- How to ensure HEI governing bodies are involved both in the agreement of performance compacts and reporting on their implementation. It was noted that governing bodies have a legitimate interest in the outcomes of such compacts.

The Board noted the Committee's report.

### **3.5 Report of Committee on Teaching & Learning (National Forum for Teaching & Learning)**

3.5.1 Dr Ramsey presented the Committees report.

#### *3.5.2 DELTA Award Update*

Committee members were provided with an update with regard to the most recent DELTA Award Review, a celebration event for awardees to be scheduled in September/October and expected 2022 applications.

#### *3.5.3 SATLE 2022 Funding - Reporting Structure*

Committee members provided feedback on this issue. Commitment to multi-annual funding. The Committee considered how best to ensure we get a sense of the impact of that funding on those concerned who teaching and learning and student success.

#### *3.5.4 Forum Associates advisory group*

It was agreed that Forum Associates were to continue towards year end, pending new HEA legislation.

#### *3.5.5 Student Associate Assembly Update*

It was noted that the new legislation will contain significant details in terms of student involvement and engagement. Is it possible that through NF, we could have a link to broader range of student and academic input? It was noted every institution has a link to the Forum.

### 3.5.6 Staffing of National Forum

Members requested that filling the outstanding positions in the Forum be expedited. Mr Mellett advised two posts have been filled. The Chair agreed to raise this issue with the Chief Executive Officer also.

The Board noted the Committee's report.

## 4. Gender Review Expert Group – Memorandum A 30/22

Ms Niamh O'Donoghue and Professor Anne Scott Chair and Member respectively, of the Expert Group attended for this item.

Ms O'Donoghue noted the HEA is conducting a Second Gender Equality Review of Irish Higher Education Institutions over the course of 2022. The purpose of today's meeting with the HEA was to brief the Board on developments with the review to date and elicit the views of the Board on this important matter. She noted leadership is extremely important in driving this agenda forward. While there is strong evidence of progress in this area, there remains a lot more to be done. Experience has differed greatly across different settings and different groups- accordingly it may not be appropriate to make "one size fits all" recommendations.

The following issues were considered;

- Precarity of employment is a critical issue- should we be legislating for this, or is it more appropriate to use performance framework? A number of institutions have moved to agency workers, the vast majority are female and experience difficulty progressing in career. Members noted an approach that combines both would be most effective having regard to the need to retain flexibility (especially in research areas) while ensuring staff have rights and progression opportunities.
- Focus should be not just be on academic staff but also support/management staff within HEIs.
- Gendered impact is very significant when looking at research career pathways and female postdoctoral researchers. Professor Scott noted the difficulty is not so much in attracting female staff to PhD roles rather it is retaining them once they qualify given the lack of research career pathways.
- Do issues of gender fluidity affect discussions of gender equality? While it was noted that this matter is increasingly prominent and there are discussions on how best to collect gender data, the Expert Group were of the view that the group needs to focus on its remit – gender equality.
- Issue of racial diversity, how is this reflected in the data collected thus far? Some information in relation to ethnicity is collected, and a large part of the ongoing stakeholder engagement is focused on tapping into different elements of the female cohort. Considering ethnicity and disability as intersections is being carried out as

part of the analysis. It was noted the Athena Swan has commenced to look at race equality.

- We have seen gendered dimension from the impact of the pandemic- clearly significant concern around carer responsibility. It also affected academic input but also impacted hybrid/flexible working. Women who did not have caring responsibilities experienced greater productivity, however women and parents suffered with additional responsibilities. Childcare is a big issue coming through.
- Concept of cultural audits- has this come up? This has been raised via Athena Swan. Concern was raised over the administrative burden associated with Athena Swan much of this falls on female staff. There is the risk that institutions might tick the right boxes but inappropriate behaviour may continue under the surface, a culture audit may pick this up.
- Have the group considered other career levels below senior management? There was a concern that females were under-represented in these groups. It was confirmed the group would be looking at this in addition to other professional and support roles.
- While there have been marked improvements in data quality the issue of data availability will always be a concern. Reference was made to an earlier report commissioned by the HEA which pointed to the need for institutions to invest in HR (and other) systems.
- It would be desirable to have better links between staff gender equality matters and student gender equality concerns.

Ms O'Donoghue advised that the Expert Group hope to submit their report in the autumn. If HEA members had further issues they wished to make these could be communicated through Dr Woods in the Executive.

## **5. Presentation on New National Research & Innovation Strategy – Impact 2030**

5.1 Dr Deirdre Lillis & Mr Joe Moore from the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science made a presentation on Impact 2030: Ireland's Research and Innovation Strategy.

There are five pillars of Impact 2030;

- Maximising the impact of research and innovation on the economy, society and the environment,
- Impact of research and innovation structures on excellence and outcomes,
- Innovation driving enterprise success,
- Talent at the centre of the research and innovation ecosystem,
- All-island, EU and global connectivity.

5.2 A key consideration for the HEA will be the formation of a new agency that will amalgamate the Irish Research Council and Science Foundation Ireland. It is hoped to build



on the existing strengths and relationships of both bodies and enhance the wider national research & innovation system. The Department plans to engage extensively with key stakeholders including the HEA, IRC and SFI on this new agency and a new Landmark Research Bill.

The following issues were raised;

- Alignment of intent will be crucial and thorough engagement throughout the process should be prioritised.
- Whole of Government approach to research is welcomed.
- Research performers need to have a voice in future developments.
- International outlook is welcome- how can these developments be used as an opportunity to attract researchers in areas such as climate action and sustainability?
- Irish engagement with Horizon Europe following Brexit. Mr Moore indicated that while negotiations are ongoing in terms of the association of the UK with Horizon Europe, it is welcome that Irish researchers have reached out to other European consortia. It was confirmed there are currently education and research attachés in Brussels.
- Institutional autonomy to be preserved.
- Dr Lillis indicated that the new Evidence for Policy unit in DFHERIS will have a critical role in linking up researchers and central government.
- Engagement with business on research and lessons that can be learned from other countries.
- There was some disappointment that the new strategy did not address funding – core, competitive programmes and research overheads. Dr Lillis noted the bulk of research funding comes through capital votes and accordingly it is important that the Department can point to the impact of research investment in solving matters of concern to society.
- Reference was made to the adequacy of stipends, and Dr Lillis noted that this was a matter for the research agencies to make a case and an increase in stipends was likely to result in fewer awards.

5.3 Members in particular considered the proposed new research agency and noted there may be concerns from some stakeholders. The commitments made by the Department following the announcement of the new agency have provided some reassurances. It was important that the commitment to consultation with stakeholders was honoured. The role of the HEA in overseeing research in the HE sector following the enactment of the forthcoming new legislation and its relationship with the new agency was considered.

Members considered how best to involve both IRC and HEA in the consultation process and at what stages. It was agreed the Executive would prepare a position paper on this matter for the next Board meeting.

## 6. SETU Governing Body – Memorandum A 31/22

Members were requested to approve the competencies required for the selection of up to 8 external members of the South East Technological University (SETU) Governing Body in accordance with the Technological Universities Act 2018.

The following issues were discussed;

- Under a section titled “Individual Requirements”, commitment to education/familiarity with higher education should be emphasised. This was broader than higher education (international ) expertise
- expertise in widening participation and awareness of the opportunities for technologically enhanced provision in a geographically dispersed region

Members also noted the time commitment of up to 25 days a year, which without compensation might be off-putting.

**Decision-** The Board approved the competencies subject to the above two points and agreed the Executive should maintain a list of competencies having regard to today’s decision and previous discussions.

## 7. 2021 Annual Report – Memorandum A 32/22

7.1 Members were requested to approve the draft annual report for submission to the Minister.

The following issues were raised;

- Should TUTF be referenced in Funding section? It was agreed the Executive would review this.
- Next steps- the report will be proof read, translated and then issued to the HEA design house.
- It was noted that the new legislation would be a good opportunity for the HEA to rebrand and consider a house style for reports.

**Decision-** Members approved the draft annual report.

## 8. Membership of HEAnet Board – Memorandum A 33/22

8.1 Members were requested to approve the appointment of Dr Sandra Collins to the Board of HEAnet CLG. Members were advised a further paper on the HEA’s relationship with HEAnet and CAO will be prepared for the September meeting.

**Decision-** Members approved the appointment of Dr Sandra Collins to the Board of HEAnet CLG.

## 9. Executive Report – Memorandum A 33/22

The following issues were raised;

- What is the status on the Employment Control Framework? Executive are continuing to seek clarity from DFHERIS on overall ceiling for 2022.
- The Governing Body Chairs of ATU and St Angela's College sent a joint letter to the Minister confirming the intention to submit an application for the incorporation of St Angela's into ATU. It was confirmed that an application could be considered on an administrative basis pending the necessary legislative changes to the TU Act, 2018.
- Staff Departures- It was confirmed that exit interviews have recently been held and the Board queried if there were there any underlying factors the Board should be aware of? Mr Mellett indicated the primary factor was that staff have been offered better roles – promotions or permanent jobs. Full details will be provided in the HR metrics report at the next meeting
- Covid-19 Costed Extensions reviews- It was confirmed the impetus for the audit came from HEA.
- Leadership programme- proposals from IUA/THEA are being prepared and as paper will be brought to the next available F&G Committee meeting.

## **10. Members only**

10.1 No matters discussed.

## **11. Presentation from BDO on Cyber Security**

Due to unavoidable absences of some members of the Authority and the Executive, the Chairman asked that this session be postponed to a later meeting.

## **12. Next Meeting**

The date of the next meeting was arranged for Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> September 2022.

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Chairperson

Date